A Delusion Dispelled

(No. 1651)
DELIVERED BY
C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." Ezekiel 14:20.

WE are told in the opening verse of this chapter that certain of the elders of Israel came to the Prophet and sat before him. You need not ask who these elders were, or from where they came because it is evident enough they were not a deputation from the Jews who were left in Judah and Jerusalem. They were individuals of distinction from among the exiles of Chebar. That they came to enquire of the Prophet of the Lord, we gather from the answer that came to them by the Word of the Lord. And we might, also, infer from the matter of the terrible denunciations that were uttered, something, at least, of the manner of enquiry they proposed. The men were downright hypocrites—they were followers of the false prophets who are exposed in the previous chapter as seeing vanity and divination—and then saying, "Jehovah says," though Jehovah had not sent them!

Now they come, these elders, to interview the true Prophet of the Lord, and before they have time to state their errand, the Word of the Lord confronts them with a life-like portrait of their own characters. "These men have set up their idols in their heart, and put up the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?" For persons who were idolaters at heart to ask counsel of the living God, as if they would learn His will, though they defied His Law, was a most insulting mockery! The thought which seems to have nestled in their breasts and prompted their visit was, after all, the exposure that Ezekiel has made of the wickedness of the land and of its inhabitants—may it not still be consistent with the mercy of the Lord to spare the city, as He would have spared the city of Sodom at the intercession of Abraham, for the sake of the few righteous men that remained in it?

The answer, as you are aware, was an emphatic "No." A reference to the 26th chapter of Leviticus and a rehearsal of the four judgments which should work the desolation, stand associated with the protest which is repeated again and again, each time, it seems to us, with more vehement force—"Though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness."

Now, my main objective this evening will be to assert, to illustrate and to enforce this one distinct feature in the moral government of God. In all the procedures of Divine judg-

ment, the principle of individual responsibility can never be relaxed. Hence the need of personal piety—the absolute necessity that men and women should pray for themselves—that each one should repent for himself, that each one should believe for himself and that each one should, in his own proper person, be born again by the effectual operation of the Spirit of God!

No proxy in these matters is possible! Sponsors in religion are a wicked superstition—their use degrades the minds of men and profanes the worship of God—they ought to be forever done away with! I charge you, as you love God and your own souls, and the souls of others—sooner die than stand sponsor for child or man, for it is a sin, a mockery, an offense before high Heaven! Every man must take heed to his own soul. "Let each man prove his own work for each man shall bear his own burden," and every one of us must give an account for himself at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Among the various shifts and schemes for taking comfort without a satisfactory title, or a plausible reason—the idea adopted by some that the righteousness of their friends may be of some use to them—is the most pernicious!

"They are the children of eminently gracious people. Surely," they say, "they cannot be lost!" They are connected with those whose name is known and whose memory is fragrant in Christian society. They were born and brought up in a house dedicated by family prayer! They have been cradled and nurtured in the midst of godliness. They readily believe that those who live in the back slums and have grown up to be wanton and willful, depraved and dishonest, will certainly perish—but can it be that those who have walked in the paths of morality and observed the ordinances of outward religion should be cast away? They scarcely think that it could be consistent with propriety to resist their claims to some discriminating consideration! Though they do not say as much in words, yet they secretly flatter themselves with the idea that the godliness of their ancestry and the scrupulous integrity of their parents will be enough to shelter them from responsibility.

There are others, to mark a lighter shade in self-deception, who indulge a hope that the prayers of their dear ones will be heard for them, although they never pray for themselves. They fall back in time of need upon the belief that, surely their mother's prayers will be answered on their behalf, or their wife's petitions will bring down a blessing upon them!

They do not embody the notion in words—I wish they did—for if people were to place such thoughts in black and white, they would never like to acknowledge them! Their folly would be too palpable. They entertain a hazy notion that because they have been so often prayed for, a blessing must come to them sooner or later! They will not awaken themselves to seek the mercy of the Lord, or quit their sins and lay hold on Christ to obtain the promise of pardon and peace—they vainly dream that something mysterious will happen to them one of these days in answer to good people's prayers. In fact, some of them eagerly ask the prayers of the godly, though they never pray to God for themselves!

My text is a stern rebuke for any who have taken themselves to either of these refuges of lies! I want to sound an alarm and drive them out of their hiding places. Oh, that God may be pleased to make His own Word effectual to this end! "Though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." Now, it cannot be denied that there is great power in godliness and a mighty prevalence in the intercessions of godly people to bring down rich blessings upon men. You are perfectly right in seeking the prayers of Christian friends! Why, even the Apostle Paul said, in the name of all the sacred ministry, "Brethren, pray for us."

You can hardly ask for a choicer favor from the servants of God than that they should pray for you. But certain circumstances may entirely neutralize the prayers of the godly. Such circumstances were present in the case of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in Jeremiah's day. They went on so far in idolatry and all manner of vice that God said that He would not hear Moses and Samuel, though they stood before Him to plead on their behalf! He told Jeremiah that he might as well cease to weep and pray, for He would never hear him for that people. And here, by Ezekiel, He declares that if so wonderful a trio as Noah, Daniel and Job should join in intercession—He would not regard even them! And just so it is at this hour—if men continue in their sin—if, after hearing the Gospel, they refuse it.

If they persist in rejecting it; if they stifle conscience; if they silence the voice within. If they perniciously resolve to indulge their lusts and will not repent and turn to God, then the excellence of their friends will rather aggravate, than make amends for their guilt—and the prayers of their friends will be so utterly nullified and made of no effect, that nothing but the dread sentence will avail them—they must perish! They have not personally believed in Christ and accepted Him as their Mediator, therefore they must perish. They have dissipated the last vestige of hope by rejecting the only way of salvation and they must perish! Though they come of a line of saints and in their veins there runs the blood of the faithful, they must perish! Though they have the tradition of a sound faith handed down from generation to generation, and though the escutcheon that has descended to them from holy ancestors is free from blot—if they refuse Christ they must perish!

And though they have been born and bred, cradled and cared for where holy hymns make up their lullaby, yet if they give not their own hearts to Christ, but set up idols in their hearts—they must perish—perish miserably with their own iniquity upon their heads. Was not Ishmael the son of Abraham? Yet he came not into the Covenant! Was not Esau the child of Isaac? Yet he obtained not the inheritance! Birth, blood and family count for nothing in this matter. Thus there are two propositions, which, as God shall help me, I will endeavor to set plainly before your eyes. First, the righteousness of the most godly cannot be of use for the ungodly. And, secondly, the prayers of the greatest intercessors cannot help if men persist in their unbelief.

I. First, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE MOST GODLY CANNOT AVAIL FOR THE UNGODLY. We have to prove this and we do so, first, by referring you to our text, and asking you to read it for yourselves. Mark how the anger of the Lord kindles and how the words are launched forth like hot thunderbolts from the lips of the Most High. The statement is clear; the supposition is startling, but the oath that seals the Oracle of Heaven appalls us. A coincidence that was not likely to occur is imagined to put the utmost strain on the delineation and to give language a stress that cannot be surpassed. As a matter of fact, we are told that if Noah, Daniel and Job were in the midst of Jerusalem, yet their conjoined virtues would not be of any use to save any but themselves!

I wish I could help you to realize the picture as it must have flashed before the vision of the Seer. Three saints who were not contemporaries, for their lives on earth were passed in distant centuries and different circumstances, meet together in a season of terrible emergency. The sacred annals of those days knew no names more illustrious, no stars that shone more brightly, than Noah, Daniel and Job. Their sympathies are all excited, their hearts are in unison and their prayers blend together as they bow before the Altar. You look, you listen in trembling suspense, as you cast a glance at the miserable inhabitants of the doomed city and consider the fate of those captives who are languishing in a land far away. With what measure of acceptance will those passionate appeals for mercy be heard?

Listen, the verdict comes from the Throne of God! They deliver their own souls by their righteousness and no more! Not one of them saves so much as his own son or his own daughter by his supplications! What a wail comes up as the inexorable decree is pronounced! But the echo that lingers longest in my ears is that awful oath— "As I live, says the Lord God." Next to this, I am going to ask you to inspect more narrowly the portraits of these men of God who are presumed

to have stood counsel for the defendants—and to have occasioned so much astonishment because with all their special pleading they signally lost their case!

Noah is the very pattern of godly fear! A model of that "fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom," just as Abraham was a model of faith and the father of the faithful. Moved with fear, he built an ark for the saving of his house. Heedless of the ridicule of the many about him, he built a huge ship on dry land. He became a preacher of righteousness, and though few, if any, were converted by that preaching, he persevered for 120 years, obediently doing what God commanded him, for a testimony against the ungodly. Scarcely can we find a better man than this second father of the human race from whom we have all sprung.

Next to him we have mention made of Daniel. He was alive at the time when Ezekiel wrote—a young man, I suppose, of about 30 years of age. It is very singular that he should be sandwiched in, as it were, between Noah and Job— two men of the olden world. He must have been highly esteemed in his own generation. Ezekiel, moved by the Holy Spirit, groups

him with those whom history had canonized. He was a man greatly beloved of God and, no doubt, by his contemporaries, he was very much appreciated. Sterling virtue and an elevation of character above the common standard of a good man would be indispensable to his taking rank as one of so remarkable a triumvirate. And when you think of him—of his integrity in youth when he would not defile himself with the king's meat. When you think of his steadfastness in prayer in riper years, when, with his window open toward Jerusalem, he prayed as he had done before, even though by a statute of the realm, the penalty of making supplication to the God of the Hebrews was death—what a model of thorough manliness he is!

There is a majesty about Daniel. He is the John of the Old Testament. He is the Seer who saw visions of God like the chosen one of Patmos. The combination of qualities that are embodied in such a man is worth your study. So chivalrous was his sense of duty that he is honored by kings! So holy is he in his conscience, as well as in his habits, that the King of kings reveals to him the secrets of His government! There is none like Daniel! "Yet," says God, "though in addition to Noah, Daniel stood before Me, his righteousness would suffice only for himself and could not be of the least profit to anyone else."

To complete the trio, there is Job, to whom we have Infallible testimony that he was perfect and upright. Satan, himself, could find no fault with his character, though with fiendish malice he insinuated a sinister motive for Job's scrupulous integrity. "Does Job serve God for nothing? Have You not set a hedge about him and all that he has? You have blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Your hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face." You remember that he did not curse God, but he blessed Him and his faith triumphed over his fretfulness even on the dunghill of his poverty, when he was covered with sores and filled with anguish! Surely Job is a model of excellence. "You have heard of the patience of Job." "My servant Job," was the honorable designation that the Almighty gave him. Moreover, He bestowed on him high praise and a double blessing at the end of his trial.

Now, if we had any one of these three men to plead for us, we should look upon him as putting a great weight in the scale. If we had for our next door neighbor, or brother, or father, either of these—if there were any transference of righteousness from one man to another—we should hope to shade ourselves under the wings of Noah, or Daniel, or Job! But here the Lord declares that if the whole three were put together, they should not save son or daughter. No, dear Friends, "You must be born again." You must be made righteous, each one for himself, or else if you had all these friends at court, which you have not, they would be unable to avert the course of justice, or obtain for you the slightest favor! The text puts it plainly—"Though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness."

This Truth of God may be further substantiated by observing the course of Providence as regards the things of this life. Could the merits of friends and parents secure the salvation of their relatives or children, we must expect to see "the son or the daughter" of a righteous man screened from the full punishment of his own misdeeds. But we have evidence that such is not the case. Let me give you Scriptural illustrations. Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant. He had a brother, Aaron, not so great a man as himself, but still an eminently holy man. Listen, you that are the sons of gracious men. Aaron had two sons and the father's dignity rested upon them—and they became priests of the Most High God. But, do you know what became of them? Drinking too much wine—alas, what a snare is that!—they entered into the Holy Place of God with strange fire and the fire of God consumed Nadab and Abihu, though they were the sons of Aaron! And what did Aaron say about them? We read this, "And Aaron held his peace."

He could say nothing. He had to bow his head before God. He knew that it must be—that if even a child of God's High Priest pollutes the Holy Place, the fire of the Lord must come forth against him. Thus you see that Aaron could not overshadow his own sons and save them in the day of the Lord's anger. Take another case equally sad. David had a favorite son who became the cruel adversary of his own father. In open rebellion Absalom attempted to usurp his throne. Yet even in the tumult of battle, the king would have spread the aegis of protection over his own child. "Beware," he said to

his generals, "that none touch the young man Absalom." You remember how he fled from the fray, but fled in vain—a just retribution overtook him. The locks of his hair in which he gloried were caught in the low branches of an oak and there he hung. Then, as you hear David cry, "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, my son, my son! Would God I had died for you!" you see that the righteousness of David could not deliver his son Absalom even as to this life.

If you needed other proofs, I would give the instance of Judas, which is greatly to the point, not in the matter of relationship, but in the matter of association. Judas consorted with 11 of the princes of the Church of God, for such I call them, now that they have gone up to their thrones. No, more, Judas consorted with the Master Himself and dipped in the same dish with our Redeemer! Yet, you see, the righteousness of 11 Apostles could not cover Judas. And because he did not believe in Jesus, neither did the righteousness of his Master cover him! And so this man perished in his own iniquity. These examples I have given you from the Bible. Were I to try and turn over the pages of my recollection, I could give you many miserable proofs that the father's righteousness does not cover the son. I am afraid I shall touch a very tender string with friends here present who, in their own sons, have sad proof that it is so.

I have seen the preacher of the Gospel whose son was committed to prison. I have known the father to be a minister of Christ and his son a ringleader in infidelity, or a chief actor in

things too filthy and profane to be mentioned here. Full many a child of godly parents has, in this life, brought himself to beggary, to disgrace, to disease, to death. It is a sad fact, but it is so. There may have been, perhaps, grave fault at home. That I cannot tell—God knows—but so it has been that men who, to the best of our judgment, were not only godly, but eminently so, have, nevertheless, had the wretched lot to see their sons and daughters given up to work iniquity with both hands greedily. God save you from such a sorrow, but the recurrence of these facts goes to show that the most godly man's righteousness cannot be of use, even, for son or daughter. What need is there, however, that I multiply proofs?

The scales of justice must be poised with an equal hand. Partiality is out of the question. God is no respecter of persons. Were it otherwise, personal obedience to the will of God could be dispensed with! There would be in this world a number of chartered libertines who would plead a mother's godliness or a father's Christian character as a setoff for their own indifference or profanity—as if they had a special license to live as they like because their parents were godly. Would you have it so if you could? I would not. I should think it a most dangerous institution. Thank God, His Divine justice has never given immunity to any vice. If a man eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge. A spendthrift shall rue the course he has run and shall beg bread, even though his father were a saint of the innermost sanctuary.

If a man indulges foul passions, he shall suffer for it in his own body, let his father be as gracious as he may. If a man puts his finger into the fire, it will burn him. If he tempts the flood in time of danger, it will drown him. You may groan to think he was the child of so good a man, but the laws of Nature are not to be trifled with. If you act contrary to them, they will be contrary to you. Relationship, which is but an accidental circumstance, is not to be confused with religion. That the righteousness of one man could compensate for the recklessness of another man is a monstrous conceit. What if I am, as I thank God I am, the son of His handmaid? I dare not to presume on that! What if my father is a minister of the Gospel? What if my grandfather preached the Gospel? I thank God that such Grace was given to them, but there is nothing in that upon which I dare presume! I think the meanest pride in all the world is the pride of ancestry, for how on earth can a man have any credit due to him for a contingency which never could be at his own disposal? It must be a matter of God's own dispensation and if he has received it, why does he glory as though he had not received it?

To suppose that Grace comes with ancestry would be a supposition exactly opposite to the declaration of the Spirit of God by John, where he says of the godly, "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." There must be a birth by the Spirit of God, or the first birth will be nothing whatever to our advantage. However well-born at first, you must be born again! If the righteousness of one man could excuse the unrighteousness of another man, then the great principle of responsibility would be reversed. You and I, who were born in the midst of Christian associations, are responsible

for the Light of God which we receive. If we sin, we cannot sin so cheaply as others. If a man transgresses against the holy example of parents, he scores seven for every sin to what another would have done who had been trained up under vicious surroundings. Assuredly he is not a less sinner, but a greater sinner who, being born in the midst of godliness, ventures to depart from the good way, transgress the sacred precepts, and refuse the Savior!

That is the principle of Scripture—to whom much is given, of him much shall be required—and we have to say daily to you children of the godly, that if you fall, your exaltation by your privileges will cause you a more awful fall than the fall of others. We say to such as you, "Woe unto you, Bethsaida; woe unto you, Chorazin; woe unto you, Capernaum! You have seen the mighty works of Christ, which, if others had seen, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes, and if you repent not, woe unto you!" Such is the teaching of the Word of God. But the opposite hypothesis that the goodness of one individual can compensate for the badness of another is utterly hollow, not to say grossly vicious! Painful though it is, dear Friends, I must carry the assertion a step further.

The righteousness of good men has not availed to save their relatives from the terrors of the world to come. Instances of this come uncalled for to our recollection. Begin at the beginning. There is Cain. Who is his brother? Abel. Abel is a man whose faith is acceptable with God. Does that save Cain? No, he was of that Wicked One and slew his brother. And why did he slay him? Because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous. Cain, where are you tonight? Are you sitting here and do you dream that your brother, Abel, now with God, can, by any means, bless you? That must not be. Dispel the delusion! The opening chapter of history refutes it. The first two sons that were born to Adam depart from earth in different directions.

Look, again, at Ishmael. His father, Abraham, the father of the faithful, said, "O that Ishmael might live before You!" Yet Ishmael becomes the very type of the children of nature who do not inherit the blessing that belongs to the children of promise! Look at Esau, born at the same birth with Jacob, children of a godly father, yet we read of Esau that he was a profane person. The godliness of holy Isaac does not save Esau! Look at Hophni and Phinehas, priests of God by office, but sons of Belial by character! Their father Eli, with all his faults, was a man who feared God. Yet as for these sons of his, they died in their sins, from which no sacrifice nor offering could purge them! Look at Jehoram—his father, Jehoshaphat, was a truly gracious man—though, alas, he turned aside, joined with Ahab and married his son to the daughter of that woman, Jezebel!

And, ah me, how many a young man is ruined by some such perilous alliance! For money, for business, or for social position they are wedded to the ungodly. Some of you sell your daughters to the devil that they may make a respectable match, when you know that this unequal yoking is forbidden by Gospel precept! I am ashamed of Christian people who lend their countenance to this breach of the Lord's Commandment! In this world there is

a blight on such unions and in the world to come—well, over that you would wish to draw the veil. The life of Jehoram was evil. His death was painful and premature. His end was without hope, yet he was a son of Jehoshaphat who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord!

How tenaciously men will cling to the idea that godly ancestors can help them is illustrated from that parable of our Lord in which He tells us of the rich man who lifted up his eyes in Hell and cried, "Father Abraham." As a descendant of Abraham, he looked for pity and relief, even in the place of torment! Ah, but he failed to obtain a drop of water to cool his tongue by that plea. Take the warning to yourselves, Sirs, I beseech you! It does not matter of whom you may be descendants—they cannot relieve the pains of Hell for you! Unless you, yourselves, have personal faith and a personal renewal of heart, though you had Noah, Daniel and Job to take your part—"As I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness."

II. Now I come to our second proposition. THE PRAYERS OF THE GREATEST INTERCESSORS CANNOT

AVAIL IF MEN PERSIST IN THEIR UNBELIEF. God forbid that I should discourage any of you from praying for your parents, your children and your friends. Let us never leave off praying for them. But if any man in this place is sitting comfortably in his seat, saying, "My wife prays for me; my mother prays for me; my children pray for me. It will be all right with me—their prayers will suffice for me—without any penitence or faith on my part," I should like to touch him on the shoulder and whisper in his ear these words, "Though Noah, Daniel and Job were the intercessors, they could deliver none but their own souls."

Noah was undoubtedly a man of prayer. Still, there was not a single person saved by Noah's prayers except those that went into the ark. And if God would give to us, His people, everything that we ask for, yet we would not ask Him to save you if you will not believe in Christ. If you set up your idols in your heart and keep the stumbling block of your lust before your eyes, we cannot, we dare not pray for you that you may be saved contrary to the Gospel! Daniel was mighty in prayer, but all that his prayers ever did could not save Israel from the fatal results of the follies to which they clung. Jerusalem was destroyed, notwithstanding the prayers of Daniel, and the Jews are scattered among all lands, notwithstanding that the holy Prophet pleaded for the prosperity of Zion. We can only pray according to the will of God and our prayers must be that you may be saved in the Lord's own appointed way—we cannot ask Him to change His way for you.

Job prayed for his friends and his friends were forgiven. But, note it well, not without a sacrifice. They had to bring seven bullocks and seven rams and offer up for themselves a burnt offering before the prayer of Job on their behalf was heard. If you will bring a sacrifice for yourselves—if you will present Christ as your Sacrifice—then will our prayers go with yours and you shall be blessed. Had they offered no sacrifice, Job's prayers could not have

availed for them. You must believe in Jesus with a faith distinctly your own. Were the whole Church on earth to lift up one continuous prayer and persevere in it from generation to generation, it could not save one unbelieving man! While he remains in unbelief, the wrath of God abides on him. If you buoy yourself up with a deceitful hope that it is different, you will presently sink down in blank despair.

What a man of prayer Moses was when he held back God's hand till the Lord cried, "Let Me alone, that I may destroy them." But Moses besought the Lord God with urgent prayer and he prevailed. Yet even Moses did not avert the

sentence pronounced on the generation which he had brought out of Egypt. Their carcasses all fell in the wilderness, save Joshua and Caleb. Nor could these two righteous men preserve one single person beyond themselves. All the intercession of Moses could not save an unbelieving generation. Because they believed not, they all died. As for Samuel, you will remember how he mourned for Saul, whom God had put away, till God said to him, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?" He had to give it up and go and anoint David. The prayers of the devout Prophet could not save the disobedient king!

Oh, how this should take any of you off from a vain confidence in the prayers of others and lead you to pray for yourselves! And look to Christ for yourselves! A parent's prayers are a sad pretext for a child's presumption. Striving together in prayer, saint with saint, there is a mighty power. But what a strife is that when the soul we seek is struggling to be free from all restraint only to plunge deeper into sin! Remember, beloved Friends, that all the prayers of godly men put together cannot alter the rule of the Kingdom of God. And what is the rule of the Kingdom of God? Here is one of the rules, "Except you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven." Suppose Noah and Daniel and Job, and Moses and Samuel and Jeremiah—those six—should pray God to let a man go to Heaven without being born from above and renewed by the Spirit of God? Would that be of any use? Do you think the constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven would be altered for their asking? Oh no! The will of God is not affected by the whims of men.

Well, here is another rule of the kingdom, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned." Now if Noah, Job and Daniel were all to pray that this statute might be repealed and a resolution more consonant with the caprice of mortal men should be substituted in its place, do you think the appeal would be allowed? Surely our cries to God must not be complaints of His decrees! Our petitions must be submissive to His Word, not subversive of His wisdom! He will not change the ordinances of His Kingdom because men are stubborn! Like the laws of the Medes and Persians, His decrees can never be altered! They stand fast forever and they exclude forever from Heaven those who abide in unbelief.

No, Sirs, if you are not reconciled to God, you cannot have fellowship with Him! If you are not made meet to be partakers of the inheritance, you cannot enter into the enjoyment

of it! In the atmosphere of Heaven you could not breathe, for without holiness no man can see God! If you believe not in Jesus Christ, you must die in your sins! Remember that all the prayers of godly men cannot alter the nature of sin and if they cannot alter the nature of sin, then they that continue in it must perish! If we were to hold a Prayer Meeting to prevent a person from being burnt who would put his hand into the fire, would that be of any use? If a man who cannot swim will persist in leaping into the river, what is the use of my asking you all to pray God to preserve his life? If a man puts a bottle of acid to his lips and drinks it, what is the use of our coming together to pray that his life may be spared when the deadly poison is destroying it? If he drives a dagger into his heart, he must die, unless God is pleased to reverse that order, which, according to the poet, "is Heaven's first law."

There is a way of salvation—"Believe in Jesus Christ and live"—if you will not have that, where are you, my Friend? Are you such a fool as to sit there and say, "I shall be saved by my wife's prayers"? Your wife's prayers will rather seal your doom! They will rise up in judgment against you! That you were so much prayed for implies that you were admonished and entreated at a most loving rate. You will not be able to say, "No man cares for my soul." A mother's prayers will ring in your ears and excite remorse when repentance is no more possible. The cries of the lost will be more terrible than the recollection of her tears and agony for you. Oh, remember this! Sin is fire and it must burn! Sin is Hell and it must torment the man who continues in it! There is no help for it. Pray as much as ever we like, if you do not get out of sin, you cannot get out of destruction! If you do not find pardon through our Lord Jesus you must be punished!

Moreover, the prayers of good men cannot alter the conditions of the eternal future, so long as the present abides the same. This must be palpable to any sane judgment. The palace of luxury and time prison of penal servitude are but faint pictures of Heaven and Hell. What is Heaven? The abode of perfect spirits washed in the blood of the Lamb. The right of admission, how can it be obtained? There are qualifications that cannot be dispensed with. And there are disqualifications that cannot be denied. As British subjects, we have a right of petition to our Queen. But of what use would that be, if with a required number of signatures, we could ask her Majesty to confer the Victoria Cross on a burglar? Or how can you suppose that God will receive a rebel amongst His loyal courtiers? It cannot be!

And what is the meaning or purpose of Hell but this—that he that will have sin must have sorrow? He that will hate God must be miserable. There is no law more immutable than, "to be good is to be happy," and to be bad is sooner or later to be wretched. It must be so. Trust not, therefore, to the prayers of others, but come to Christ for yourselves, that you may be cleansed from sin and made right for Heaven. Perhaps you say, "Sir, I did not think prayer would suffice to effect a change in my circumstances without a corresponding change in myself, but I thought that, somehow, by prayer, I should be compelled to believe and to repent."

Compelled to believe and to repent? Well, Man, what sort of repentance and faith must that be which comes of compulsion? Surely that man's heart is not sincere who says, "I hope to go to Heaven, though it is against my own inclination." You would gladly be made to hate sin against your will? That is strange! Are you to be made to love righteousness against your own liking? I have heard of fathers saying that their daughters should marry So-and-So, but I defy them to make them love those with whom they have no feeling. No, these matters are far too delicate to be managed by coercion. It cannot be!

Neither does the Holy Spirit, Himself, employ force to compel those who are unwilling. He has a power that is quite congruous with the freedom of the will by which He sweetly turns the mind and will by blessed argument and illumination. By enlightening the understanding, He controls the will. But, believe me, you will never be lugged into Heaven by your ears! You will never be strapped down and carried to Heaven as we see drunken women carried to the stationhouse on a stretcher. Have you ever fancied that such would be the case? Has such an absurd idea ever entered into your head, that somehow or other, without your ever seeking it, you will be taken up by some celestial surgery and chloroformed into Glory?

It will not be so. Turn to this Book and see. How did the prodigal get to his father's house? Did his father asphyxiate him and make him insensible and then strap him down and carry him there? Not at all. But first he was hungry and he tried to fill his belly with the husks, but he could not. And he became more hungry, still, and then he said, "I will arise, and go unto my father," and he went to his father. Yes, it was all of Grace, but still he arose and came unto his father. It was all of eternal love, but he did leave the swine and seek his home. It was of infinite pity, but he did think and he did will to go! And, what is more, he did go to his father's house. He did all that and then, when he was a great way off, his father met him!

Now, believe me, though I always preach free, rich, Sovereign Grace with all my heart, I never understood and never shall understand that God treats us like logs of wood and blocks of marble, and cleaves or chips us about as if we had no life, or will, or intelligence! It is not so and only fools think in such a fashion! You are men, not dumb driven cattle! You will not be saved like asses, but like men! You will not be saved like horses and mules and cats, but like men and women who can think! You will have to think and you will have to hate your sin—and you will have to cry for mercy and you will have to believe in Christ—and if you do not, you will perish! All the prayers that have ever been poured out can be of no use to save you except through your being brought to trust your Savior, hate your sin and become obedient to His will.

Do you believe this, dear Friends? It may be that out of this large congregation there are only a few to whom these statements are particularly appropriate, but I thought that I would leave the 99 sheep in the wilderness—there are plenty of sweet grasses for you in the

quiet places of the Word of God—and I would go after some that have gone astray in this direction, for I long to find you. Oh that the blessed Spirit would convince you of your sin and lead you to say, "I have played the fool. I have been trusting to a privilege which I ought to have used for another purpose. Now, I will seek God and I will yield to the blessed Gospel and put my trust in Jesus." Remember, there is a righteousness which you can have—the righteousness of Jesus Christ which can cover you. Though Noah and Daniel and Job cannot deliver you, Jesus can!

There is an intercession that can be heard for you—the intercession of One that lives and was dead—and now makes intercession for men and is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him. Come unto God by Him and His intercession is yours and shall be your health! And His righteousness is yours and shall be your covering! God grant it for the dear Redeemer's sake. Amen and amen.